



Observing World No Tobacco Day

Out of all the dangerous habits people indulge in, smoking is probably one of the deadliest. It not only causes damage to nearly every organ in the body, but it is also one of the leading preventable causes of early disease and death. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco kills approximately half of its users. That's over 8 million people every year. It's estimated that around 1.2 million of those victims aren't actually active smokers, but victims of second-hand smoke. Many of these victims are children. As per the American Lung Association, second-hand smoke often leads to lower respiratory tract infections in infants and children, while also contributing to the number of cases of sudden infant death (SID).



Tobacco today and in recent years

Tobacco use has been a major cause of health problems and premature death for several decades, and addiction to nicotine is still the main reason for its continued use. It's estimated that, over the course of the 20th century, traditional smoking killed 100 million people. Between the 1930s and 1950s, tobacco companies even used physicians as a strategy to market their products, featuring doctors and referring directly to them to persuade consumers of their safety. It was only in the 1960s that a series of major medical reports made it clear that tobacco posed a danger to one's health.

Around the end of the 20th century, the popularity of tobacco products declined as an understanding of the health risks associated with smoking grew. Today, the health burden of smoking has shifted from high income to low-to-middle income countries. While the markets of North America and Western Europe are slowly shrinking, they seem to be growing in certain areas in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and the former Soviet Union.

According to the National Income Dynamics Study 2017, approximately 20% of South African adults (age 15+) smoke cigarettes, an estimation that's down from 33% in 1993.



Traditional cigarettes vs e-cigarettes: Is switching to vaping a good idea?

For many smokers who want to quit cigarettes, the strategy is to switch to a perceived healthier alternative, like e-cigarettes. The messaging surrounding these products - that they are supposed to be safer than cigarettes because they deliver nicotine to the lungs via a vapour (aerosol) rather than smoke - has contributed to making them a desirable option. In addition, the fact that the e-cigarette liquid comes in a variety of interesting flavours and doesn't produce traditional cigarette smoke, has also helped to make this a popular choice. This is particularly true for high school and university students, and the number of vapers seems to be increasing fast. 2011 saw only about 7 million vapers, but by 2018 their numbers were up to 41 million. BBC News reports that the market research group Euromonitor expects this to grow to 55 million in the coming year.

However, there is no little to no long-term scientific evidence to indicate that vaping is actually safer than traditional tobacco products. Recently, six deaths and 450 reported cases of lung disease linked to vaping in parts of the US contributed to the FDA's decision to finalise a plan that would stop the sale of all non-tobacco flavours in the US.

Michael Blaha, M.D., M.P.H., director of clinical research at the Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease, explains that emerging data also seems to link vaping with chronic lung disease and asthma, while there are additional associations between dual use of e-cigarettes and smoking with cardiovascular disease. "You're exposing yourself to all kinds of chemicals that we don't yet understand and that are probably not safe."

While most e-cigarettes do not contain tobacco, many of them do contain nicotine, which makes them as addictive as traditional cigarettes. On top of that, special features like extra-strength batteries can deliver a higher concentration of nicotine.

"What I find most concerning about the rise of vaping is that people who would've never smoked otherwise, especially youth, are taking up the habit," says Blaha. "It's one thing if you convert from cigarette smoking to vaping. It's quite another thing to start up nicotine use with vaping. And, it often leads to using traditional tobacco products down the road."

According to the American National Academy of Sciences, scientists discovered a variety of chemical substances and ultrafine particles that are known to be carcinogenic or toxic in e-cigarette aerosols, refill liquids, cartridges, and environmental emissions. These substances have also been known to cause respiratory and cardiac disease. In addition, e-cigarettes can produce various harmful chemicals, like formaldehyde, acrolein, and acetaldehyde.

Want to quit smoking? Here's how

Quitting any addiction is easier said than done, but each year, millions of people are successful in becoming non-smokers. Here, the Mayo Clinic provides valuable tips on how to make it as easy as possible:

1. Practice relaxation techniques, like deep-breathing exercises.
2. Delay. Avoid giving in to your craving by waiting 10 minutes, and distracting yourself while you wait. It will pass.
3. Try to remember that withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, mood swings, constipation, and depression are only temporary.
4. Exercise regularly. This will reduce the intensity of cravings and keep you distracted.
5. Opt for nicotine replacement therapy. Talk to your doctor about the available options.
6. Identify your trigger situations and try to avoid them.
7. Have a support system in place. Tell people that you're quitting, and ask them to help keep you accountable. Join a support group of other former smokers. Use smoking help hotlines.
8. Keep healthy snacks like nuts, seeds, carrots or crackers to help your cravings. Sugar-free chewing gum is a good substitute.
9. Reward yourself. Quitting smoking is going to save you money, so make sure to keep the money in a separate account or location. When you have enough money, spoil yourself.
10. Try acupuncture.
11. If you slip up, remember that it doesn't mean you can't quit for good.
12. Have a list of why you've stopped smoking handy when you need the reminder.

Possible reasons include:

- Enjoying a healthier lifestyle and body.
- Stopping second-hand smoke from affecting your loved ones.
- Saving money.

Each time that you resist the temptation of smoking, you've succeeded in getting a step closer to being healthier and free from addiction.



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